



# HEALTH FOR LIFE

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## PCP

### Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia

#### What Is PCP?

PCP is the short name for Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia. PCP is an infection in the lungs. PCP is caused by a germ named Pneumocystis carinii. This is a common germ found in the air.

PCP has been called an opportunistic infection (OI). OIs are illnesses caused by usually harmless germs. Germs that cause OIs are usually not a problem to people with healthy immune systems. They are a problem to people with weak immune systems.

#### Who Can Get PCP?

Any person with a weak immune system can get PCP. The immune system is the part of the body that fights off infection. Helper T cells are a part of the immune system. A normal T cell count is 800 to 1000. OIs can occur with a T cell count of less than 200 and usually happen when the T cell count is less than 100. If your immune system is weak and your number of helper T cells are low, you may not be able to fight off PCP.

#### HIV And PCP Risk

People infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can get PCP. HIV attacks helper T cells and causes a very slow fall in the T cell count. This may take many years. As your T cell count gets lower, the risk of getting all infections increase. PCP usually occurs when your helper T cell count is less than 200. Any person with a weak immune system can get PCP.

#### What Are Signs Of PCP Infection?

Some first signs of PCP are fevers above 100.5 F for several days, fatigue, and weight loss. Later, there is shortness of breath and cough. This is usually a dry cough with no mucous produced. PCP is serious. It is important to identify this lung infection early so treatment can begin. A doctor should be notified if your T cell count is under 200 and you have any of these signs and symptoms that do not go away.

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## How Is PCP Diagnosed?

A bronchoscopy will be done to help diagnose PCP. Your doctor uses a scope during this test to look down your airway and lungs. A chest x-ray, blood tests and breathing tests also will be done.

## Is There Treatment For PCP?

There are many different drugs available to treat PCP infection. Some of these drugs must be given into your blood vessels. Other drugs may be given into your blood vessels and by mouth. It is important to take the medicine even when you are feeling better.

Once you have had PCP you may get it again. Your doctor will order preventative medicines for you to take regularly. If taken regularly, these medicines should help keep PCP from coming back. You also may keep PCP from coming back by keeping your immune system healthy. It helps to follow the basics of healthy living:

- Reduce stress as much as possible by learning to manage life stresses.
- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise regularly
- Get enough rest
- Avoid drugs and alcohol
- Go to the clinic or doctor for regular check-ups
- Report any new signs and symptoms to your doctor

Ask your doctor or nurse for more information.

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